

REVELATION – SERMON 16

REVIVING A DEAD CHURCH

Revelation 3:2-3

INTRODUCTION

- Many churches have the appearance of life and vitality, but the fact is there is no true spiritual life.
- Such was the case in the Sardian church; they had a name and reputation for being alive, but in reality they were dead.
- Apostasy and spiritual death is the most likely outcome for any church.
- History has proven that while there will always continue to be true churches until the end of the age (Matthew 16:18), individual churches over decades and centuries tend to depart from the faith and eventually die.
- Not one of the dozens of churches mentioned in the New Testament is still in existence today.
- If a church is to remain steadfast in truth and godliness it requires careful and diligent maintenance.
- Previously we examined Christ's diagnosis of this church as being dead.
- Today we will see that the Lord does not leave them condemned, He writes them a prescription to cure them of their deadness.
- The very fact that Jesus has hope for a church as dead as the one in Sardis and encourages the people there to work towards its recovery, is an indication of the value that Christ has in His churches and that we ought to have also.

I. THE WAY TO SPIRITUAL REVIVAL

- A. Be watchful

1. This word means to *awake* and indicates a continual watchfulness
2. We are to watch ourselves (Luke 21:34-36)
3. We are to watch for others, faithfully warning of danger and judgment (Ezekiel 3:17-19; Acts 20:28-31)
4. Many churches have gotten away from the very purpose of their existence.
5. Many have dropped their gaze and fail to see the harvest of souls before them (John 4:35)
6. The opposite of watching is sleeping (1 Thessalonians 5:6)
7. The city of Sardis was twice captured when they became complacent in their defences and failed to watch for the enemy
8. The fellowship of the brethren is a help to guard against sleep
9. Watching and prayer are often linked in Scripture (Nehemiah 4:9; Matthew 26:41; Mark 13:33; 14:38; Luke 21:36; Ephesians 6:18; Colossians 4:2; 1 Peter 4:7)

B. Strengthen the things which remain

1. Though the church was generally dead, there were genuine believers there, and therefore there was hope for the church's revival
2. Where there is some grace, even a small amount, God can take that and multiply it into great grace (John 1:16; James 4:6)

C. Remember

1. Remember your salvation
 - a. Your wretched state as a lost sinner

- b. God's work of conviction in your heart by His Holy Spirit
 - c. The revelation of Jesus Christ to your soul as the only Saviour
 - d. The moment your received Him by faith as your Lord and Saviour
2. Remember the apostolic faith and practice found in the New Testament

D. Hold Fast

1. Hold fast the doctrines of the faith (2 Timothy 1:13)
2. Though many in the church had let these slip, the faithful remnant were not to do likewise

E. Repent

1. This church had deviated from the will of God and needed to turn back to Him
2. To repent is to humbly acknowledge our sin and be willing to turn from it unto God (Luke 15:17-18)
3. It is a complete change of mind that results in a change of action (2 Corinthians 7:11)

II. THE WARNING OF SUDDEN RETRIBUTION

A. Christ's admonition is augmented by a threat

1. If God's goodness does not move us to repentance (Romans 2:4), then His severity must (Romans 11:22)

B. The unrepentant church will be judged directly and personally by Christ

1. This does not refer to Christ's coming in the Rapture

2. Nor does it refer to Christ's coming in the Second Advent (cf. Matthew 24:43; Luke 12:39; 1 Thessalonians 5:2; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 16:15)
3. It refers to His immediate intervention in judgment upon the church
4. The Corinthians experienced such judgment upon their church (1 Corinthians 11:27-30)
5. The Lord will not only judge the wicked, but "The Lord shall judge his people" (Hebrews 10:30)
6. Just as Sardis fell to their enemies through complacency and failure to watch, so the Lord would come upon the complacent and heedless church
7. Evidently Christ did come upon them in judgment, and removed their candlestick (cf. Revelation 2:5)
8. "For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged." (1 Corinthians 11:31)

CONCLUSION

1. A sound and pure church can, in a very short space of time, depart from the word of God and die.
2. If a church is dying, the Lord is not to blame, but the members of the church, and they bear the responsibility of turning it around.
3. Many churches and many Christians must, like Josiah, "rediscover" the forgotten book of the law and commit to obeying it (2 Kings 22:8ff)
4. In many hearts, what was once a burning flame has become a dying ember.
5. Yet Christ can take "the smoking flax" (Isaiah 42:3) and raise it to a flame, using the kindling means of prayer and the word (Isaiah 42:3)
6. Those who refuse to humbly repent should be warned: "*the Judge standeth before the door*" (James 5:9)